Midday Meals Scheme
in Tamil Nadu

171

Midday Meals Scheme

in Tamil Nadu

by

Dr. M. Sundararaj

1995

2 (J3)
N97.
214595

MIDDAY MEALS SCHEME IN TAMILNADU

by Dr. M. Sandararaj

"Records" popularly called the raw materials of History furnish information on individuals, institutions, organisations, administrative machinery of the Government and movements of social political, economic and Religious matters. Tamilnadu Archives, one of the oldest and biggest Archives in South East Asia holds records from 1670 contains flood of information on various aspects of Administrative and historical matters. In Madras the birth place of British rule in India emerged as a centre for constitutional and democratic experiments which paved the way for the formation of political parties and the establishment of Government out of native people. In this regard, the Justice Party Government (formed in 1921) introduced a series of reforms for the upliftment of the Non Brahmin in educational and employment matters. Considering education is a base for socio-economic and political awakening, the Justice party luminaries like Theagaraja Chettiar wanted to impart education to the backward and downtrodden people who constitute the major population in the Madras Presidency from time immemorial to the present day. The condition of the majority of the people particularly the depressed class, was pitiable in all folk of life. They were depressed in social and economic matters and their educational condition was very low due to their ignorance and poverty. Besides this education was a costly affair and the poor and backward class people could not afford for that. Hence the Justice party personalities wanted to introduce Midday Meals Scheme to the poor people to attract many students to attend the schools and reduced their burden to a certain extent.

The records and reports available in the Tamilnadu Archives such as Local and Municipal Department, Education Department, Finance Department, Social Welfare Department, Native News paper Report, Fortnightly report Madras Administration report, Madras Informan, Madras Legislative Assembly and Council debates give a lot of information about the origin, growth, function and administration of the Midday meals scheme in Tamilnadu since 1922 onwards.

The introduction of midday meals Scheme in 1922 in the Madras Corporation area by Thyagaraja Chettiyar opened a new chapter in the annuals of the growth of education in Tamil Nadu. Thyagaraja Chettiyar, the founder president of the Justice party and then president of Madras Corporation passed a resolution at the corporation council meeting on 16th September 1920 to provide the boys within a Midday tiffin at a cost not exceeding one anna per head per day.

At first he introduced the system in localities inhabited by the depressed class whose strength and attendance of these schools was found unsatisfactory due to the poverty of the parents who could not afford to provide the boys with a midday meal unless the boys themselves earned it by work and partly to the difficulty the boys experienced in going home and returning to school in the short afternoon interval. As an experimental measure this scheme was first tried in the corporation school in 1922 in Thousand Lights and as the result was very encouraging the practice was since extended to two more schools located in chetput and Mirsahibpet. Subsequently it was proposed to extend the scheme to other schools.

Since the Madras city Municipal Act of 1919 did not provide any such expenditure Thyagaraja Chettiyar asked the government to sanction the expenditure and the Government sanctioned it.[1]

The working of the midday meals system in the schools of the Corporation of Madras attracted many other schools in different parts of the Madras Presidency which decided to introduce it. Accordingly in 1924 the Taluk Board School at Chirakkal started feeding of Adi-Dravida pupils in the elementary schools from the elementary Education fund but the Government passed orders that Elementary Education Fund should not be used for midday meals.[2] This order affected the Madras corporation too which had to stop the midday meals scheme in April 1925. This raised a hue and cry in the Madras Legislative Council when the matter was indicated by L.C.Guruswami a member of the house who asked to present the house the strength of the five school prior to the discontinuance of midday meals system

---

1. G.O.1008, Local and Municipal Department 7-6-1922
2. G.O. 1890, Law Education, 3-12-1924.

Name of School	Prior to the discontinuance of the Midday meal		After the discontinuance of the midday meal	
	Number on rolls	Number of attendance	Number on rolls	Number of attendance
1. Mirsahibpet	304	255	286	195
2. Oobrapalayam	199	158	152	123
3. Thousand Lights	333	265	331	248
4. Cochrane Basin Road	230	186	208	164
5. Chetput	370	289	370	241 [3]

above table shows the adverse effect of the stopping of midday meals Scheme. However, the midday meals scheme continued in the Corporation Schools till 1927 and after that it was stopped on financial grounds. Justice ministry being the offspring of the British Administration had to dance to the tune of the creators. Besides this, the architect of the midday meals Thyagaraja Chettiyar's death on 28.4.1925 added another cause for the end of midday meals scheme in Madras.[4] His successors did not pay much attention on the subject of midday meals scheme. The initiative taken by Thyagaraja Chettiyars later developed into big schemes during 1957 and 1989, when the Congress Government headed by K.Kamaraj and AIADMK headed by M.G.Ramachandran started midday meals scheme and Chief Ministers nutrious meals scheme respectively.

On 1st November 1957 the Madras Government under Chief Minister K.Kamaraj introduced midday meals scheme to the poor students in the elementary schools. The administration of the scheme for the supply of school meals in a centre was carried out by the local donors who constitued themselves into two committees known as General Committe and Executive Committee. These committees were

---

3. G.O.1212, Local & Municipal Department 23-3-1926.

4. NaVasakti, Madras, May 1925.

subjected to the supervision of the officers of the Education Department. The unit for the administration of the scheme was the village or the town concerned. But if the local people desired they could have separate committees for each school or a group of schools in the village or town.

The General Committee consisted of All donors who made contributions either in cash or kind and minimum such contribution could be specified by the committee. The General Committee should elect its chairman and other office bearers and frame rules for transacting its business fixing the tenure of its membership and the functioning of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consisted of the Chairman of the general committee who was the Chariman of the executive committee also. The members elected by the General Committee and the number of members of the Executive Commitee were fixed by the General Committee itself. The Headmaster of the school was the non-member secretary of the General and Executive Committee. The functions of the committee were as following:

(a) to collect money and things required for the supply of school meals to poor people. (b) to arrange for the preparation and service of meals and for the custody of money and things collected.

(d) to select the pupils to be provided with meals, to appoint servants necessary for the preparation and service of the meals and to supervise their work. The committee could meet as often as necessary. The nature of the meals provided consisted of(i)cooked rice with sambar or buttermilk or curds and (2) Vegetables or pickles. It was openec to the local committees to provide better food if it had adequate resources or to vary the supply according to the local condition. The food was supplied to the school children for 200 days in a year.

Regarding the expenditure of the scheme, the cost of utensils and any other non-recurring expenditure connected with preparation

- -

and service of meqls should be entirely borne by the local committee. Towards the recurring expendititure on the scheme, Government gave the executive committee a grant calculated at the rate of the amount by which actual expenditure exceeded 4 N.P per meal per pupil or 6 N.p per meal per pupil, whichever is less. The Government started the scheme with an estimate of Rs.11 lakhs.[5] In addition to the Government grants, the local committee had to contribute 2 N.P per head and each pupil 2.N.P. But the contribution of the local committees varried from place to place.[6]

Though the Madras Government introduced the Midday Meals system, the actual burden of providing food materials to the pupils was taken by 'CARE'(Co-operative American Relief Everywhere from July 1961) It supplied the needed milk powder, cooking oil, wheat, rice, and other nutritious items free of cost. The free supply of care commodities gave a great relief to the Madras Government in financial commitments. A well established organisation of CARE worked round the clock.[7] The cardial relationship between India and America during Nehru's Regime was a blessing to the congress ruled Madras State which got all assistance from the Central Government and the American Organisation of CARE.

For the successful functioning of the scheme, the Madras Government provided adequate staff to the CARE. Accordingly field officers were posted in 1962.[8] For analysing the working of the midday meals system a state level committee called School meals and Schools Imporvement Schemes Assessment committee was constituted in 1960 under the chairmanship of K.S.Subramania Gounder,M.L.A. The committee visited many midday meals centres and made adequate ways

---

5. G.O. 1850,Education Department, 8th November 1957.

6. G.O. 862 Education Department, 28.4.1960

7. G.O. 1895, Education and Public Health Department,2.8.1961.

8. G.O. 3059 -Education 22.12.1969.

8. G.O. 241, Education Department, 22.2.1962;
G.O. 3059, Education 22.12.1962; G.O. 1805 Education 21.7.1961.

T2 (J3) N67 214595

and means for the development of the midday meals scheme.[9]

Subsequently midday meals scheme was introduced in the high schools as a voluntary measure because poverty prevailed among the high school students too. For this the Government did not make any provision and the fund was raised from donors and other voluntary organisations. During 1961, 531 High Schools under the Education Department provided midday meals.[10] During the course of the operation of midday meals system a number of new foods such as multipurpose Food, providing bread etc were experimented with the students. For the manufacture of multi-purpose food the Government made provision for the establishment of the multi-purpose food (M.P.F) plant. At the outset it was experimented in the Corporation Schools in 1960 by selecting 100 pupils for providing (M.P.F.) which showed better result. The children who were given M.P.F. put better weight than ~~then~~ the other children who were given the routine midday meals.[11] Later in 1970 as an experimental measure Modern Bread was given to the school children instead of meals in the corporation schools. But the scheme did not work out successfully because pupils preferred meals than Bread. Hence the Government dropped the plan.[12]

The working of the midday meals schemes was not free from ~~xxxxxxx~~ defects. Due to the lack of adequate staff members for the preparation of foods, the students were engaged. In many schools the foods were prepared in an unhygenic manner either in class room or outside under a tree. Besides this the teachers were also engaged in preparation and the distribution of foods to the pupils. In many schools theft of midday meals articles including utensils ~~untensels~~ were reported.[13] For eliminating such problems centralized kitchens were introduced in 1966 by the CARE.[14] Accordingly to the centralized

---

9. G.O.1930, Education, 12.9.1960; G.O.2125, Education, 6.10.1960 G.O.2556, " 6.12.1960; G.O.358, Education, 16.2.1961, G.O.573, Education 21.3.1961.

10. G.O.2751, Education, 23.11.1961.

11. G.O. 2405, Education, 15.11.1960.

12. G.O. 700 , Education, 8.5.1970.

13. G.O.129, Education Department, 14.6.67

14. Ibid.

kitchen system, the midday meals were prepared in particular centres not in all the schools. The centre preparing the meals distributed the food to the schools which came under the centralized kitchen area. The centralized kitchen eliminated many problems and reduded the burden of preparation of food in every schools by engaging students and teachers. In addition, the quality of the food was standardized and the cost of preparation was less.

The midday meals scheme of the Congress Government in the Madras State earned popularity not only in India but also abroad. Its pilot scheme of food for education enlarge the number of school children in each and every village as well as urban areas. But at the same time it was not free from criticism that it affected the Industrial and other economic growth of the state. This conception was disproved by emerging Madras province as Number 1 state in Industrial and economic developments during Congress regime

Eventhough the Congress Ministry made revolutional changes in Education and economic growth in Madras state by means of midday meals and fees concession and Five year plans respectively the congress party was defeated in 1967 general election by the D.M.K.party. During the D.M.K. regime, the midday meals scheme was continued and the Central Kitchen system got much development.[15] For transporting the food to different schools from the cental kitchen a lot of vehicles were sanctioned. For storing the CARE articles and gift goods for midday meals, the Government constructed regional godowns in Madurai, Trichi, Coimbatore and other important centres.[16]

From 1975-76 on words an additional 1.65 lakhs of Harijan children previously covered under different feeding arrangements were included in the Education Department's Midday meals programme. The Education Department gave emphasis to the village schools because poverty prevailed in the villages more and most of the people were agricultural

---

15. G.O. 1700, Education, 8.10.1970.

16. G.O. 2310, Education, 25.10.1976; G.O.1309, Education, 31.8.1976.

labourers who could not afford food to their children.[17]

In 1977 the AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnatra Kazlakam) came to power after defeating D.M.K. and the congress. The founder president of the AIADMK party M.G.Ramachandran became the Chief Minister. Experienced starvation and poverty at his childhood, he wanted to relieve the poor children from such hardships. This motivated him to launch the world renounced scheme of Nutritious meals scheme popularly called the 'Chief Ministers Nutritious Meals Scheme' from 1st July 1982 with the amount of Rs.100 crore. The programme consisted of one nutritious and wholesome meal at Noon free of cost to all pitiably poor children who have no means even for one meal a day. At the outset the Government of Tamilnadu introduced a massive programme of feeding poor children in two parts. The first part of feeding the children of age group 2 to 5 was looked after by the social welfare department. The second part of feeding children of 5 to 10 was looked after by the Department of school Education and the programme was implemented in about 25,000 schools in non central kitchen area, about 8,000 schools in central kitchen areas and about 3,000 schools under Adi-Dravida and Backward class schools in Tamilnadu in 1982. The Director of school Education acted as the Chief Monitor who had to review the scheme periodically and issue instruction whenever necessary. The District Educational officer in the District were the authority to assess grants. The cost of the food per child per day was 45 paise. The meal consisted of Rice - 100 grams; Oil-7 grams; Dhal - 15 grams; condiments, and vegetables - 50 grams;.[18]

For cooking the food, special cooks and helpers were appointed in schools and were paid by the Government. Besides this adequate grant was made for the purchase of tumbler, plates, vessels and for the construction of ovens, cooking sheds etc. Food articles were supplied directly to the school by the civil supplies and co-operative

---

17. Ibid,

18. G.O. 857, Public Department, 28 May 1982.

departments. A Local Committee was constituted with the Headmaster as the Local Secretary to oversee the scheme.[19]

The following table shows the growth of midday meals programme in Tamil Nadu between the years, 1957-58 and 1982-83.

Year	No. of pupils fed (in lakhs)	Expenditure met by Govt grant (₨ in lakhs)
1957-58	2.29	6.93
1958-59	4.00	34.10
1959-60	7.75	62.91
1960-61	8.88	82.78
1961-62	11.57	114.30
1963-64	13.11	126.79
1964-65	15.27	147.00
1970-71	16.18	196.00
1971-72	16.37	198.00
1972-73	17.64	214.00
1973-74	18.14	388.00
1975-76	20.03	450.00
1976-77	20.18	480.00
1977-78	20.25	480.00
1978-79	20.25	480.00
1979-80	20.25	480.00
1980-81	20.51	495.00
1981-82	21.00	505.00
1982-83	38.15	1200.00 [20]

The above table proves that the introduction of Nutritious meals scheme in 1982 raised the number of pupils to the midday meals which automatically paved the way for the increase of strength in schools.

19. Tamil Arasu, July 1982 Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1982.p.p. 4-5

20 CARE Records.

This system was far excellence when compared to the previous Midday meals scheme. The old schemes of 10 paise per pupil ~~pmt~~ plus 5 paise panchayat contribution was a real hardship because many panchayat and panchayat unions did not actually give their contribution so it was run only on 10 paise plus CARE help. But the new system which provided 45 paise grant from Government per child was a considerable increase and the food also was really nutritious. Formerly the teachers were wondering for raising the fund from the panchayat union and the ~~means such~~ system was done away with by the new nutritious meals scheme because the entire cost was munificently met by Government. In addition to this the teachers were relieved from the cooking and other works by making separate specific provision for cooks and helpers in every school. The Teachers' job was only to oversee the work.

The introduction of Nutritious Meals ~~System got~~ Scheme earned wide popularity to the Madras Government. Though it consumed considerable finance from the Government exchequer, its benefits were recognised subsequently. It reduced the burden of the parents of the shcool children to provide food in the noon. It is also a huminaitarian service which fed millions of school-going poor children which paved the way for the increase of strength in schools.

During the introduction of the system, economists criticised that it affected the economic growth. If the amount was spent ~~an~~ on industrial growth, it would be beneficial to all sections of people. For this the Government stated that children are the pillars of future generation. Their education would enhance the growth of the State in all aspects. Subsequently the Government have introduced free chappals and tooth powder to the school chileren and ~~have been~~ supplied in the Noon Meals Centre.

Thus Tamilnadu ~~as~~ examples other States in the sphere of humanitarian services like Midday Meals ~~system~~ Scheme started by

- -

Thyagaraja Chettiyar in 1922 in the Madras Corporation as a Nucleous scheme, later developed into an internationally reputed system. The Government of India too impressed by it and P.V.Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister of India announced in October 1995 to implement the Noon Meals Schemes throughout the country. For this the records of Tamilnadu Archives which hold the information pertaining to it became the main source materials. The documents reveal the origin, growth and function of the Midday meals schemes in a historical perspective.

Dr. M. Sundararaj

T2 (J3)
N97

214595